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Ivory scepters

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BENIN

THE OBA'S LAUGHTER

A brief note on Benin ivory scepters



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The Oba's laughter. A brief note on Benin ivory scepters.

For more than five hundred years, the artists of the West African kingdom of Benin in Nigeria created outstanding works of art mainly in brass and ivory for use in divine kingship rituals, to adorn the royal palace, and identify the King, chiefs, warriors, and other officials at court. The art of ivory has always been an exclusive privilege of Benin royalty and very delicately carved ivory scepters have an ancient history going back to the Golden Era of this ancient kingdom. They been catalogued either as scepters, flywhisks, staffs, idiophones or clappers. It has always been something of a mystery why such fragile objects carved in ivory should have been used as bells or gongs at the court of Benin city when the sound they would emit is so frail.

The aim of this short note is to establish a corpus of these works of art and explain the various hypothesis on their iconography. Having never carried field work in Benin and as an art historian focusing on form and style, I will rely on the remarkably large amount of scholarship done by Western and Benin scholars to help in my research on style and meaning of these ivory works. There are complementary cultural perceptions on the arts of Benin, a primarily Western appreciation of them as works

of art and a Benin understanding as both historical documents to reconstruct history and as ritual objects. The remarkable scholarly catalogue of the historic exhibition on the court arts of Benin curated by Barbara Plankensteiner in 2007 has become the indispensable *vade mecum* for any recent research on the arts of Benin.

In the earliest publication of two ivory scepters from the Horniman Museum (cat. n° 7 & 20), both works were described as official maces or staffs of office.¹ In their 1899 ground-breaking study of Benin antiquities, curators Charles Read and Ormond Dalton describe another ivory scepter in the British Museum collections as "ivory handle of a fly whisk (?).² A year later in 1900, General Augustus Lane Pitt-Rivers described them as carvings to be inserted on a pole.³ This description was repeated by curator Karl Hagen when he commented that the handle of the ivory scepter from the Hamburg Museum (cat. n° 23) was actually a grip to be attached to a staff.⁴ The scepter from Berlin with the equestrian figure (cat. n° 30) was originally described as a door peg to fasten a door.⁵

Later Charles Read identifies these scepters as batons or staves.⁶ Berlin Museum curator Felix Von Luschan describes them as handles for a whisk.⁷ Philipp Dark catalogues them initially as handles to a staff or possibly fly whisks.⁸ Later Dark was the first scholar to label them also as musical instruments, describing them as idiophones in his catalogue raisonné of Benin Art in 1982.⁹ Contemporary evidence thanks to the field research of

1 "Benin Carvings" in *The Seventh Annual Report of the Horniman Free Museum for 1897 and January 1898*, p. 19

2 Charles H. Read and Ormonde M. Dalton, *Antiquities from the City of Benin and from other parts of West Africa at the British Museum*, London 1899, p. 40

3 Augustus Henri Lane (Fox) Pitt Rivers, *Antiquities Works of Art from Benin collected by Lieutenant-General Pitt Rivers*, London, Harrison and sons, 1900, p. 10

4 Karl Hagen "Die Vermehrung der Sammlungen", in *Jahrbuch der Hamburgischen Wissenschaftlichen Aestalten*, 1902, n° XIX, p. 26 and Karl Hagen "Altertümer von Benin in Hamburgischen Museum für Völkerkunde", in *Mitteilungen aus dem Museum für Völkerkunde in Hamburg*, Vol. VI, N° 35, p. 77

5 *A Catalogue of African Curios & Trophies Benin Bronzes, Ivory Carvings, etc. The Collection of Dr. W. Ansorge, Mr. J.C. Stevens, Auctioneer*, London, 30th November 1909, sale n° 11.727, p. 24, lot 118

6 Charles Herbert Read, "Note on a Certain Ivory Carvings from Benin", in *Man*, vol. 10, 1910, p. 50

7 Felix von Luschan, *Die Altertümer von Benin*, Staatliches Museen zu Berlin, 3 volumes, Berlin and Leipzig, Walter De Gruyter, 1919, vol. I, p. 414, Abb. 806

8 Werner and Bedrich Foreman and Philip Dark, *Benin Art*, Paul Hamlyn, Artia, 1960, p. 46, plate 54

9 Philip J.C. Dark, *An Illustrated Catalogue of Benin Art*, C.K. Hall & Co, Boston, 1982, Illus. 44 and p. 2.4.7, III. 44 "idiophone". Dark lists only 17 ivory idiophones in this catalogue.

Benin scholar Joseph Nevadomsky for their use as musical instruments, as hand-held “clappers,” was expanded by Kate Ezra in her remarkable catalogue of the Klaus Perls Collection of Benin art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.¹⁰ As gongs or clappers, they belong to a vast and varied catchall category of “self-sounding” instruments known collectively as idiophones. Bells, rattles and slit gongs belong to this organological classification of musical instruments that produce sound without the addition of a stretched membrane or vibrating string or reed.

Scepters being defined as elaborately decorated regalia carried by high-ranking individuals during ceremonies as symbols of authority, it seems to me that cataloguing these ivory works as scepters is the most appropriate. The corpus of these scepters, as far I was able to locate all of them, is composed of thirty-four ivory works of art which can be divided into three types according to their iconography.

1. Type A. Standing human figure representing lyoba, the Queen Mother or possibly Oba, the King: 21 examples
2. Type B. Equestrian figure representing lyase, Generalissimo of the Army; 10 examples.
3. Type C. Bird of Prophecy: 3 examples

All three types follow a similar general structure with a height varying between 30 and 40 cm. The type A scepters all present a squarish base extending into a cylindrical grip whereas the type B and C ones have straight cylindrical handles. These handles then extend into a square or cylindrical base decorated with typical interlocking geometric rope-of-life design on which the iconic figures are standing.

For the type A model, eighteen of the twenty-one examples show pierced holes at the lower end on the grip, most probably for attachments of some type of small bells such as those represented on a Benin plaque in the Berlin Museum.¹¹ Only three scepters do not have a pierced base. As to the type B, based on the

photographic evidence, three present a pierced handle. For the type C, two show a pierced lower finial while the last one is missing the handle.

Type A. The Queen Mother or The King.

Benin scholars generally agree that the standing figure on Type A scepters represent the lyoba, the Queen Mother of Benin or even possibly the King (“Oba”) himself. According to Flora Kaplan, lyoba can be identified by the richness of the dress, the rows of thick coral beads around the waist and encircling the ankles, the neck enveloped by a chiefly high collar of beads.¹² Furthermore, Benin scholar Barbara Blackmun’s description of the iconic portrait of the Queen Mother fits perfectly the standing figures on our ivory scepters: “No other women except for the lyoba is portrayed in Benin art with the combination the high collar of coral beads, crossed baldrics (sometimes over a netted beadwork shirt) and a straight skirt with horizontal bands of decoration”.¹³

There are two types of headdresses worn by these representations of the Queen Mother. The first eight scepters from my catalogue (cat. n° 1 to 8) display an early period type of headdress in the shape of a gracefully slightly curving conical shaped coiffure quite similar to that modelled on the half dozen brass commemorative heads of the Queen Mother dating to Oba Esigie’ reign (A.D.1504-1550).¹⁴

This tall and pointed curved beaded headdress has been identified by Barbara Blackmun as that of the Queen Mother with the projection on the top of her head indicating enhanced capabilities in spiritual communication.¹⁵ One can date this type of gently curved conical hairdo to the first bronze memorial heads who cult was also initiated by Oba Esigie to honor her mother

10 Joseph Nevadomsky, “The Benin bronze Horseman as the Ata of Idah”, in *African Arts*, 19, (n° 4) August 1986, pp. 45-47, fig. 5 to 8 and Kate Ezra, *Royal art of Benin, The Perls Collection in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992, p. 200-01

11 Barbara Plankensteiner, ed., *Benin Kings and Rituals*, Vienna, Museum für Völkerkunde, 2007, p.313, plate 59

12 Flora Edouwaye Kaplan, “Entry Staff with lyoba” in B. Plankensteiner, *Benin Kings and Rituals*, Vienna, Museum für Völkerkunde, 2007, p. 404, cat. 179

13 Barbara Blackmun, “Who commissioned the Queen Mother Tusks”. In *African Art*, April 1991, Volume XXIV, number 2, p. 60

14 See Cat 169 in B. Plankensteiner, *op. cit.*, 2007, p. 396

15 Barbara Blackmun, “Who commissioned the Queen Mother Tusks”. In *African Art*, April 1991, Volume XXIV, number 2, p. 60 and Barbara Blackmun, “Reading a Royal Altar Tusk”, in Paula Ben-Amos and Arnold Rubin, ed., *The Art of Power. The Power of Art*, Los Angeles, Museum of Cultural History, UCLA, 1983, p. 70, footnote 11

Idia as the first *Iyoba* or Queen Mother by bestowing on her many privileges of rank, dress and symbols. *Iyoba* Idia was thanked for raising an army (the only woman reputed to have gone to “war”) and supporting her son’s military campaign to the north against the *Igala*. When she died, *Oba Esigie* commissioned to decorate her altar with extraordinary works of art in bronze and ivory such as three beautiful bronze commemorative heads with a coiffure similar to the one on the ivory scepters.¹⁶ Benin historian *Egharevba* acknowledges that both the Queen Mother or *Iyoba* and the Portuguese with their game-changing firepower such as a Portuguese canon dated from 1495-1523 collected during the Punitive Expedition of 1897 helped the Benin army.¹⁷ A similar type of headdress can also be found on larger size standing ivory statues in the Vienna Weltmuseum collection which shows considerable age and wear, probably dating on stylistic grounds to the 17th-18th century.¹⁸

The second type of headdress, a half spherical coral beaded crown is found on the remaining thirteen scepters (cat. n° 9 to 21). This second type of coiffure could be identified as male since all the bronze heads of kings show a spherical instead of a conical shape headdress even if we are not sure of their complete shape as the upper part was flattened in order to insert ivory tusks. *Kate Ezra* has also suggested that one of the scepters in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (cat. n° 19) could actually represent the *Oba* based on the presence of a large singular bead worn on his chest at the intersection of his crossed bandoliers.¹⁹ The back of the headdress of the Vienna scepter (cat. n° 17) shows five

braids of coral beads covering the nape framed by two longer one on each back side and ending each with a larger bead resting on the top of the shoulders. A variant of this second headdress with a raised crested median ridge is found on four scepters (cat n° 14, 16, 20 and 21).²⁰

In twelve of the scepters, the figures are represented their right hand holding a double gong (sometimes called *sistrum*) being beaten by a striker held by the figure’s left hand while the nine others show both arms reaching forward, hands clenched creating a cylindrical opening in its left hand as if the figures were meant to hold something.

Double gongs in ivory are restricted to the Benin kingdom royal family. Five are known today of which four are among the most exquisite and elaborate masterpieces of Benin Art covered with intricate nearly identical power-engendering images. A fifth one from the Admiral Rawson collection appears unfinished.²¹

These magnificent ivory double gongs were carried by the king and displayed during the festival honoring the Queen Mother. Also during the *Emobo* festival, the King strikes ceremonially an ivory bell to frighten any dangerous spirits lingering around. *Mrs. Webster Plass*, no doubt from information provided by her good friend *William Fagg* on her ivory gong which she subsequently donated to the British Museum, indicated that when the *Oba* was pleased, he would instruct one of his servants who stood beside him holding the double ivory gong to strike it on both the larger and smaller gongs producing two notes which are a tone apart. This gentle sound was known as “the *Oba*’s laughter”.²² Hence the title of my essay.

16 Flora Edouwaye Kaplan, “Catalogue entry Commemorative Head of a Queen Mother” in B. Plankensteiner, *Benin Kings and Rituals*, Vienna, Museum für Völkerkunde, 2007, p. 396, cat. 169

17 Jacob Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin*, Ibadan, Ibadan University Press, 1968, p. 28 and Philip Dark, *An Introduction to Benin Art and Technology*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973, p. 3 et Osarhieme Benson Osadolor, “Catalogue entry Cannon”, in B. Plankensteiner, *op. cit.*, 2007, pp. 464-65, cat. 248

18 Vienna, Weltmuseum, inv. n° 64.725 . Cfr. Armand Duchâteau, *Benin. Trésor royal. Collection du Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienne*, Paris, Musée Dapper, 1990, p. 123

19 Kate Ezra, *Royal Art of Benin, The Perls Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992, p. 201 et cat. 97

20 One should note that two larger free standing ivory statuettes showing considerable wear also in Vienna show a similar hemispherical coiffure. Cfr. Philip Dark, *An Introduction to Benin Art and Technology*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973, plate 6, n° 9.

21 It is in the collections of the Lagos National Museum, inv. n° 48.36.42. Cfr. F. Von Luschan, *op. cit.*, 1919, p. 414, Abb. 637. In his catalogue raisonné of Benin Art, Philip Dark (1982, III. 67, p. 2.4.10) lists four extremely elaborate and delicately carved ivory double gongs and a fifth one possibly unfinished and with no decoration and thirteen gongs in brass. These ivory gongs, all beautifully carved, have dated by Benin scholars to the same period as the famous five ivory face masks to the early period circa AD 1515 -1600.

22 Margaret Plass, *African Tribal Sculpture*, Philadelphia, the University Museum, 1956, p. 31, note 16-A, Ivory Double Gong.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Fig. 2 Royal ivory double gong, Benin kingdom, 16th century
 Height : 36,5 cm
 Provenance of Gong
 Collected by George Leclerc Egerton in 1897
 Collection Mrs Webster Plass, London
 British Museum, London, Inv. No Af1963.04.1
 Publication: Barbara Plankensteiner, ed., *Benin. Kings and Rituals. Court Arts from Nigeria*, Snoeck, 2007, p.315, fig. 60

Fig. 3 Royal ivory double gong, Benin kingdom, 16th Century
 Height : 36 cm
 Provenance : Dr. Norman. Ling Roth, London, 1897
 Henri Ling Roth, Halifax, 1898
 Augustus Henry Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers, Dorset, 1898-1900
 Pitt-Rivers Museum, Farnham, Dorset, 1900-1958
 Mathias Komor, New York, 1958.
 Boston, Brooklyn Museum inv. n° 58.160
 Publications: *Bulletin of the Liverpool Museum* 1898, 163, pl. 25, fig. 1
 Roth 1898, fig. 13
 Pitt-Rivers 1900, 50, figs. 155-57, pl. 25
 Roth [1903] 1968, figs. 224-25
 Publication: William C. Siegmann, *African Art: A Century at the Brooklyn Museum*, Brooklyn Museum and DelMonico Books, 2009, p.136, fig. 24

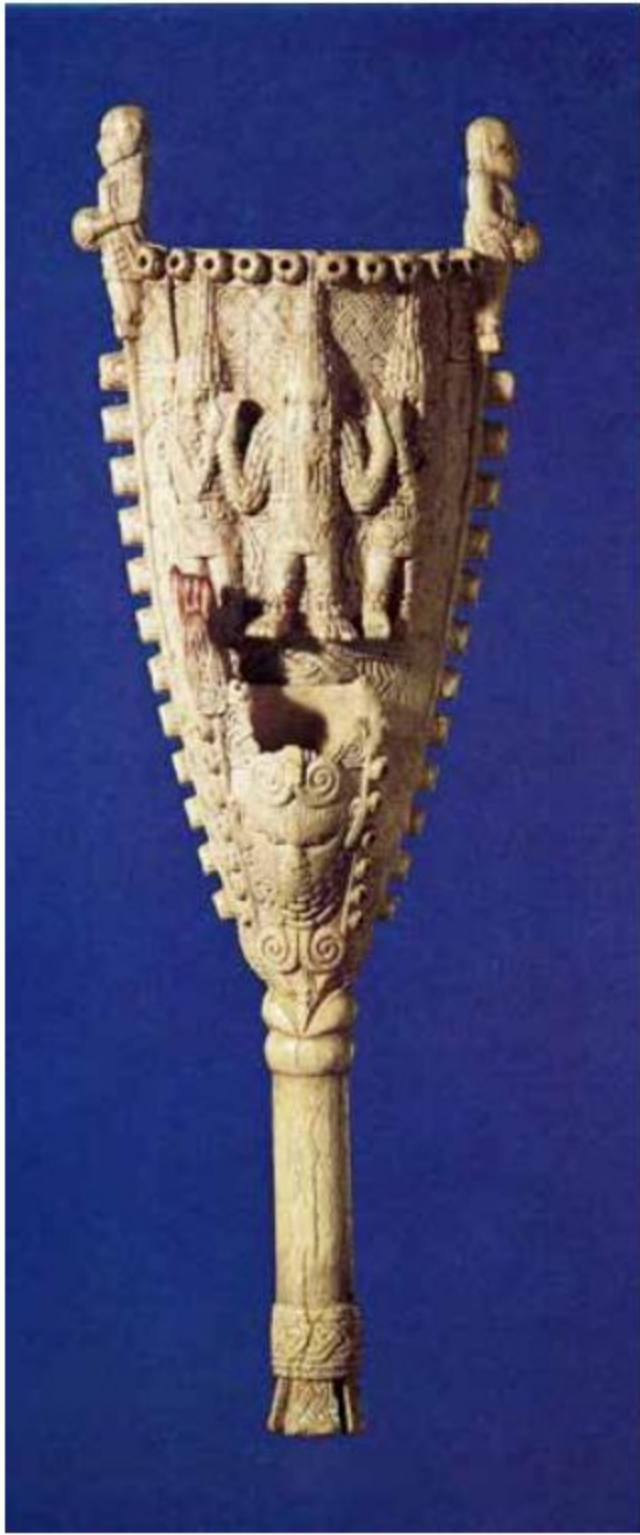


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

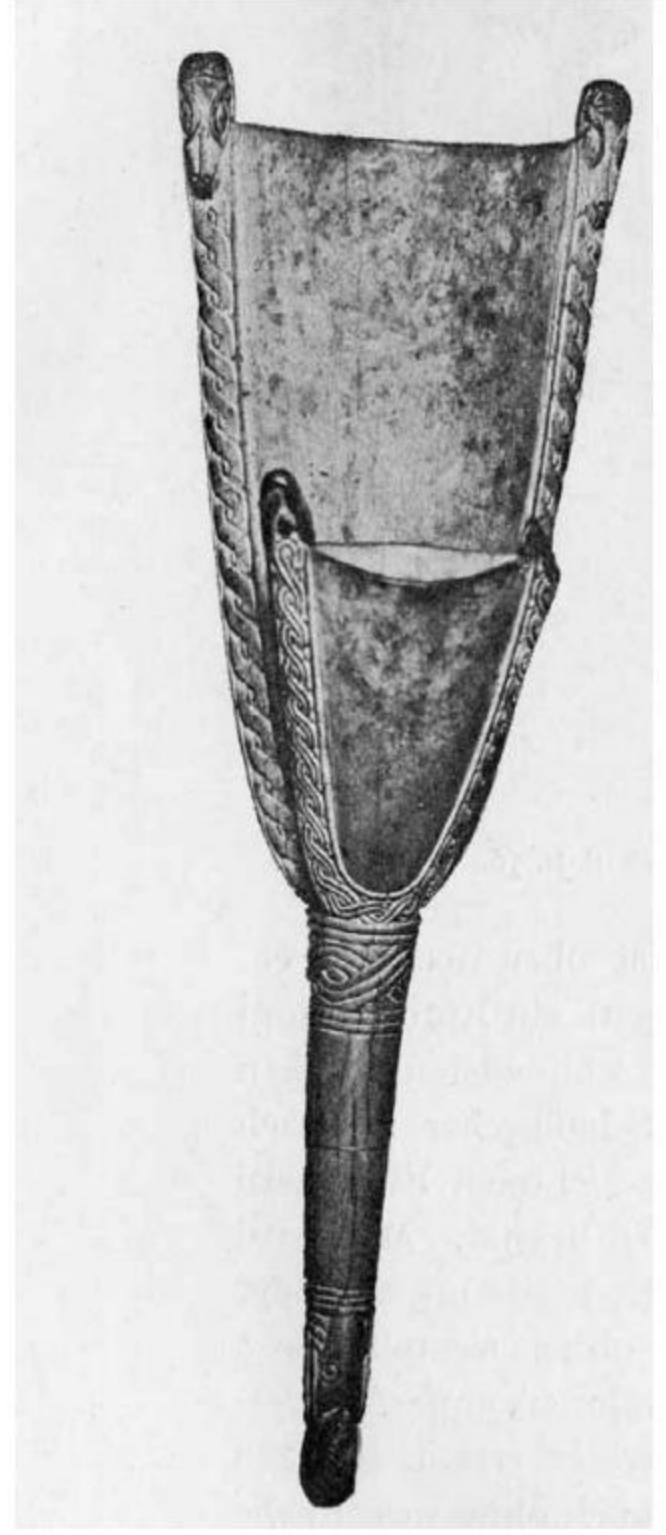


Fig. 6

Fig. 4 Royal ivory double gong, Benin kingdom, Nigeria, 16th century

Height : 36 cm

Provenance : E.P.S Roupell (Ling Roth, 1968, fig. 226)

Collection sir Jacob Epstein, London, (1920's 1959)

Adolph Schwartz Collection, Amsterdam, 1960's

Lagos, national Museum ? (Sotheby's London June 16, 1980, lot 22)

Publication: Sotheby's London, *Catalogue of Works of Art from Benin. The property of a European Private collector*, 16 June 1980, lot 22

Fig. 5 Royal ivory double gong, Benin kingdom, 16th Century

Height: 36,5 cm

Provenance : Collected by Admiral Rawson during the Punitive Expedition in February in February 1897

Nigerian Museum, Lagos, inv. 48.36.41

Publication: Felix von Luschan, *Die Altertümer von Benin*, Berlin und Leipzig, Walter De Gruyter, 1919, p. 414, fig. 638

Ekpo Eyo, *Two Thousand Years Nigerian Art*, Lagos, 1977, p. 154

Philip J.C. Dark, *An Illustrated catalogue of Benin Art*, G.K. Hall & Co., Boston, 1982, ill. 67

Fig. 6 Royal ivory double gong, Benin kingdom, 16th Century

Height : 30 cm

Provenance : Collected by Admiral Rawson during the Punitive Expedition in February 1897

Lagos, National Museum inv. n° 48.36.42

Publication: Felix von Luschan, *Die Altertümer von Benin*, Berlin und Leipzig, Walter De Gruyter, 1919, p. 414, Abb. 637



Fig. 9 The Oba in regalia (Photo Frank Willet, 1959)
Publication: Christiane Falgayrettes-Leveau, ed., *Arts d'Afrique, Paris, Musée Dapper*, 2000, p. 43, fig. 35



Fig. 7 Benin brass plaque of a dignitary striking a double gong or sistrum
London, The British Museum, inv n° Af1898, 115.68



Fig. 8 Benin ivory sceptre (Cat. 12)
Date: A.D. 1497-1794 (C14 analysis with 95,4 % probability)

Type B. Equestrian figure of the lyase, General of the Army.

I have located ten ivory scepters which represent a mounted horseman, obviously a high-ranking member of the court. The rider is wearing an elaborate helmet or headdress, an upper body vest, a bell attached to a neckband of leopard teeth, a high collar of coral beads around the neck, the right hand is holding a spear and the left hand is holding a chain-like rein that is only fastened to the right side of the harness.

Just like in the type A corpus, one can divide this second type in two groups based on two different types of headdresses: a first corpus of three scepters (Hamburg,

Liverpool and Benin City Museum, see cat. 22, 23 & 24) with a pointed conical headdress not dissimilar to that of the Queen Mother style of coiffure. The tunic worn by the Hamburg scepter (cat. 23) has been identified as a warrior's tunic worn by the king's military chiefs during military festivals. This special leather tunic is covered with red flannel as emblem of identity, indicating their status, state duties and military position. In addition, high ranking officers also wear their leopard-teeth necklaces identifying them as lyase, Generalissimo of the Benin army.²³ The traces of wear due to a long handling of the works suggest an early style dating to the 17th-18th century. Another clear indication of the age and importance of the Hamburg scepter is the ancient native repair to the right arm which has been broken and reattached with two bronze nails.²⁴ Information provided

²³ Osarhieme Benson Osadolor, "Catalogue Entry Staff with mounted warrior", in B. Plankensteiner, *Benin Kings and Rituals*, Vienna, Museum für Völkerkunde, 2007, p. 459, cat. 243

²⁴ Karl Hagen, "Altertümer von Benin im Hamburgischen Museum für Völkerkunde," in *Mitteilungen aus den Museum für Völkerkunde in Hamburg*, vol. VI, n° 35, p. 36

by an officer of the expedition mentions that these ivory figures were preserved by soaking them in some preparation of which palm oil in the chief ingredient.²⁵

The second corpus of six staffs with a bell-shaped coiffure have been tentatively dated by Barbara Blackmun to the earlier part of the 19th century, between A.D. 1804 and 1850.²⁶ In this second group, six of the riders display a different type of headdress, a bell-shaped helmet with a small disk-shaped projection on the top.²⁷ Five of the six scepters display this bowler hat type of coiffure surmounted by flattened disk shaped projection while the Sainsbury Center piece (cat. 26) has a simple spherical headdress with row of strings of beads falling on its nape. Only two of the scepters have pierced holes on the lower end of the handle, certainly for attachment while the other four are not pierced. Four of them (cat. n° 27 to 30) show sufficient formal similarities that one can attribute them to one or two artists while the one in Benin City museum (cat n° 31) appears slightly less refined in its modeling. Overall a date of manufacture circa A.D. 1815-1880 seems logical for these as none of them seem to have much trace of ritual wear.²⁸ The last scepter also in Berlin (Cat. 25), with on its back side an unusual, raised saddle, is too fragmentary to group with the other five.

In her detailed analysis of the Berlin Museum scepter (cat. n° 30), Barbara Blackmun suggest that this work was connected to the reign of king Osemwende (A.D. 1816-1848) and could represent the Leader of the Opposition and General of the Army or lyase, appointed by the king for life.²⁹ This official function of the lyase was diminished in the late 1600's by King Ewuakpe (reign about A.D. 1700-1712) but was reinstated by king Eresoyen (A.D. 1735-1750) who restored the time-honored custom of giving him his eldest daughter in marriage. Blackmun suggests that the Berlin scepter is an image of lyase Ohenmwun, whom Egharevba describes as the richest lyase of Benin from his time.³⁰

We must conclude that these lyase scepters span at least four hundred years, from circa A.D. 1570 to 1979. The iconographic motif of this specific bell-shaped helmet is chronologically early as it is displayed on four brass Benin plaques showing high ranking officers.³¹ If one accepts the new proposed revision of dating of brass plaques by Kathryn Gunsch to a narrow time span of A.D. 1540-1570, this characteristic motif gives us a *terminus post quem* date of the later years of Oba Esigie's reign.³² This bell-shaped helmet is also found on two bronze statues in the Benin Udo-Style which represents Osemwughe, the lyase of Udo.³³ The city state of Udo is located some 30 miles from the Benin City and had very briefly around AD 1515 a second functioning court during the succession struggle between Oba Esigie and his brother Arhuanran. Brass memorial heads as well as a few figures were cast around A.D. 1520. After Esigie defeated his brother, the city state of Udo was always ruled by an lyase appointed by the king of Benin. The dating of these equestrian ivory clappers ritually beaten during the annual ceremonies that celebrate Esigie's defeat of the Atah of Idah and the clacking can be interpreted as invoking the protective custody of Esigie by paying him ritual homage.³⁴ During a festival in 1979, Benin scholar Joseph Nevadomsky photographed important chiefs and *uzama* nobles beating these equestrian scepters during the celebration of their nomination as the head of the *uzama*.

The bell-shaped helmet/coiffure would belong then to what Erwin Panofsky calls a renascent form, that is, a form which repeats a past tradition in order to ensure its perpetuation. As the art historian George Kubler points out, a renascent form contrasts with a disjunctive form. He explains that disjunctive forms infuse all forms with new meaning or clothe old meanings with new forms. Over the years, Benin artists have constantly faced this predicament with forms from their artistic past:

25 See Stevens auctioneers, London, April 4, 1898, p. 12, lot. 155 for an ivory equestrian figure

26 Barbara Blackmun, "Catalogue entry "Staff with lyase" in B. Plankensteiner, *Benin Kings and Rituals*, Vienna, Museum für Völkerkunde, 2007, p. 478, cat. 263

27 I am excluding the Berlin museum scepter (cat. 25) which is too fragmentary.

28 Cfr B. Blackmun, research note on Staff 1909.1.1, *On line catalogue*, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford

29 Barbara Blackmun, "Catalogue entry Staff with lyase", in B. Plankensteiner, *Benin Kings and Rituals*, Vienna, Museum für Völkerkunde, 2007, p. 478, cat. 263

30 Jacob U. Egharevba, *Some Prominent Bini People*, Benin City, 1969, p. 21 in Blackmun, *op. cit.*, 2007, p. 479

31 Two are in the British Museum inv. n° AF1898,0115.53 & AF1898,0115.36, one is the Metropolitan Museum of Art inv. 1978.412.320 and the fourth is the Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich, inv. 1004. Cfr Von Luschan, 1919, *op. cit.*, 142-143, Abb. 238-241

32 Kathryn W. Gunsch, *The Benin Plaques. A 16th Century Imperial Monument*, Routledge, London and New York, 2018, p. 5 & 201

33 Lagos National Museum inv. n° 53.8.1 Cfr. Barbara Blackmun, "Catalogue Entry lyase", in B. Plankensteiner, *Benin Kings and Rituals*, Vienna, Museum für Völkerkunde, 2007, p. 445, cat. 224. Another statue formerly in the Vincent Price collection and now in the Dallas Museum of Art, inv. n° 1994.196.McD. See Roslyn Adele Walker, *The Arts of Africa at the Dallas Museum of Art*, Dallas Museum of Art & Yale University Press, 2009, Cat 5, p. 52-54 and Cfr. Ben-Amos & Rubin, *The Art of Power. The Power of Art*, Los Angeles, Museum of Cultural History, UCLA, 1983, p. 96, fig. 72

34 Joseph Nevadomsky, "The Costume and Weapons of the Benin Brass Horseman," in Baessler Archiv, Neu Folge, Band XLI, 1993, p. 219



Fig. 10 Chief Oliha beats the ivory equestrian figure during the 1979 festival celebrating his installation as the leader of the *Uzama*, Photo Joseph Nevadomsky in J. Nevadomsky, "The Benin bronze Horseman as the Atah of Idah", in *African Arts*, August 1986, volume XIX, Number 4, p. 47

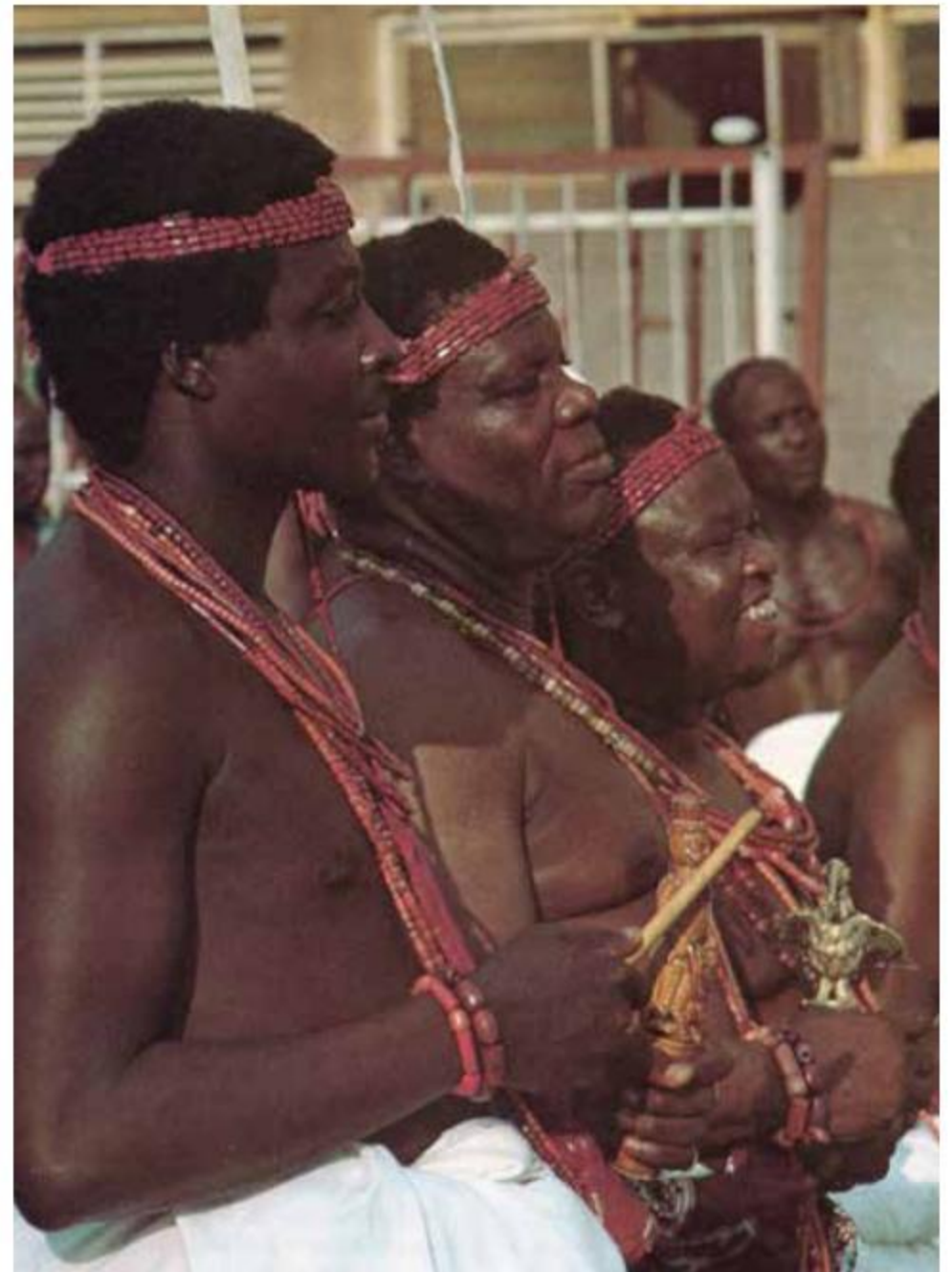


Fig. 11 Uzama nobles perform at Ugie Oro, Photo Joseph Nevadomsky in J. Nevadomsky, "The Benin bronze Horseman as the Atah of Idah", in *African Arts*, August 1986, volume XIX, Number 4, p. 43

either these formal features are still viable and worth prolonging or are no longer application and must be rejected.³⁵

Let us take as a general postulate that these scepters are made from a cluster of forms that are linked in a complex way to older and more recent works of art, via a network of internal and external influences. Each formal feature may be an early or late arrival in each series, and the sum of all formal features (the work of art) may belong to numerous sources of greatly varying origins.

The systematic age of these Benin scepters, that is, their position in the different sequences of forms that compose each work of art is as important to the history of art as the date it was created (its absolute age). Each sequence evolves according to its own timetable: its duration each time assumes a precise form. Artistic successes occupy different places in their own chronology, some appearing

early, others much later. The rose window of Chartres, for instance, has a systematic age that is different from that of the cathedral's ogival vaulting. In terms of Benin art, the systematic age of the coiffure motif dating back to A.D. 1570, could very well be different from the age of equestrian theme adorning theses scepters,

Furthermore, horses are associated with wealth, speed, elegance and elevation. They represent power: political, military, level and mystical. Riders are superior beings because they dominate the work, physically and spiritually. The symbolism attached to some equestrian figures can relate to historical events while others offer a mythical significance. A shift of meaning can also take place, from the celebration of one remarkable individual, king, or warrior, to a generalized iconographic statement on the genealogical pre-eminence of the founding ancestor of a royal dynasty or important clan. Horses

35 George Kubler. « History - or Anthropology - of Art ? » in : *Critical inquiry*. June 1975, p.759 ; and Erwin Panofsky, *La renaissance et ses avant-courriers dans l'art d'Occident*, Paris : Flammarion, 1976.

have always been linked to kingship and prestige in West Africa. The word for horse in Dogon language also refers to be in a state of trance, or possession by the power of the gods.³⁶ Anyone who masters horses must possess enough physical and mystical strength to be able to sustain this theophanic elevation. Riders are elevated to a mystical union with their gods.

This iconography of horsemanship belongs to what Robin Law calls Pre-Islamic equestrian techniques first represented in the Nigerian plateau.³⁷ The leaded bronze Igbo Ukwu scepter or fly whisk handle represents the first image of this type of an equestrian figure dated as early as the 9th century A.D.³⁸ Law describes this original West African tradition of horsemanship as riders equipped with a form of single-reined bitless bridle, and riding without saddle or stirrups. Law also notes that this original West African technique is also found on all Benin equestrian bronze figures which are likewise stirrup-less with single-reins bridles.³⁹ This West African tradition was mainly non-military in use as the stability of the rider was weak. The revolutionary transformation of this original West African horsemanship into a warfare cavalry was started by the introduction of new breeds of horses and new techniques of riding and combat from the Islamic world north of the Sahara from the 14th century forward.⁴⁰

Type C. The Bird of Prophecy

Only three examples of the bird of prophecy scepters exist in ivory⁴¹. However, as we know that skeuomorphism is quite frequent in Benin art, bird of prophecy scepters are much more numerous in brass as Philip Dark has listed

approximately sixty-five of these metal idiophones.⁴² A major formal difference between the brass and the ivory ones is the size and shape of the beak of the bird and the manner in which the wings are represented. For the brass ones, the wings are outstretched wide open as if the bird was about to fly away while in ivory the wings are closed and resting against its body. The legs of the ivory ones are rather thick for any avian creatures and look almost more like human legs. Could these ivory images actually represent dancers dressed as birds?

The iconography of the brass birds of prophecy has been thoroughly analyzed. They are said to have been first immortalized in brass immediately after Oba Esigie's victory over the King of Idah circa A.D. 1515. Oba Esigie's hegemony was challenged by the Atah (king) of Idah when the Igala army came close to attacking the Benin capital. A strong defense by Benin warriors repulsed them and the remaining invading army was hotly pursued to Idah, their capital. A bird was heard to cry that Benin would go down defeated but on Esigie's orders, some Portuguese soldiers fighting in the Benin army are reputed to have shot the bird. The Atah surrendered and his kingdom became a vassal of Benin.⁴³ King Esigie then included a ceremonial dance by *uzama* nobles and chiefs during the annual ceremony called Ugie Oro, during which they clack the bird's beak to honor of the commemoration of Benin's victory.

The fact that there are at least two brass plaques representing this ceremony with chiefs hitting the bird staff and if one accepts the new proposed revision of accepted dating by Kathryn Gutsch of Benin plaque to a narrower dating of A.D. 1540-1570, it gives us a *terminus post quem* date of the later years of Oba Esigie's reign.⁴⁴

36 Bernard de Grunne, "Heroic Riders and Divine Horses, in *The Minneapolis Institute of Art Bulletin*, volume LXVI, 1983-1986, p. 92

37 Robin Law, "The Horse in Pre-Colonial West Africa", in Gigi Pezzoli, ed., *Cavalieri dell' Africa. Storia, iconografia, simbolismo*, Milano, Centro Studi Archeologia Africana, 1995, p. 179

38 National Museum, Lagos, inv. n° IR359, Cfr. Ekpo Eyo and Frank Willet, *Treasures of Ancient Nigeria*, Detroit Institute of Art and Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1980, p. 87, cat. 36

39 See Law, *op. cit.*, p. 180

40 Robin Law, *The Horse in West African History: the role of horse in the societies of pre-colonial West Africa*, Oxford University Press, 1980

41 I am not including the ivory one formerly in Baron Freddy Rolin collection published in d'Udekem & Kolbe, *African ivories*, New York Gallery Freddy Rolin, 1978, p. 14, n° 7 as it seems to be most probably a 20th century copy.

42 Philip Dark list approximately thirty-seven examples in museums and about twenty in private collections. Nevertheless, it is difficult to come up with an completely accurate count of those in private hands as some may have been counted more than once in his inventory. Since Dark's publication, the Metropolitan Museum of Art has received six brass idiophones from the Perls Collection. See Philip J.C. Dark, *An Illustrated Catalogue of Benin Art*, G.K. Hall, Boston, 1982, p. 2.4.7 and Ezra, 1992, pp. 202-206, cat 90 to 95

43 Cfr. Joseph Nevadomsky, "The Benin Horseman as the Ata of Idah", in *African Arts*, August 1986, volume XIX, number 4, pp. 40-47; Joseph Nevadomsky, « Kemwin-Kemwin: The Apothecary Shop in Benin City », in *African Arts*, November 1988, Volume XXII, number 1, pp. 72-83; Kate Ezra, , *Royal Art of Benin, The Perls Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992, pp. 197-208; Alisa LaGamma, *Art and Oracle. African Art and Rituals of Divination*, New York The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000, pp. 74-75 and Joseph Nevadomsky, "Catalogue Entry Staff with Brid of Prophecy" in B. Plankensteiner, *Benin Kings and Rituals*, Vienna, Museum für Völkerkunde, 2007, p. 446, cat. 225

44 Kathryn W. Gutsch, *The Benin Plaques. A 16th Century Imperial Monument*, Routledge, London and New York, 2018, p. 5 & 201

Fig. 12 Benin brass plaque of three dignitaries striking bird of prophecy staffs
London, The British Museum, inv n° Af1898.0115.117



The identification of this brass long-beaked, long-legged and with large wings spread bird of disaster or prophecy has been elusive ranging from a type of kingfisher, an ibis to a hornbill or even the talking myna which can imitate human speech very well.⁴⁵ William Fagg's remark that all the known brass bird scepters seem to belong to the Late Period of Benin brass casting art suggest that that this type of object may have changed formally over time.

Getting back to the ivory bird scepters, the one collected by surgeon Edgar Dimpsey in 1897 (cat. n° 32) shows a short straight beak very different from beaks on the brass ones. The Berlin Museum staff (cat. 33) has a longer and curved beak whereas on the bird from the Ratton collection (cat. n° 34), the long-curved beak is actually a modern wooden restoration done by the famous Japanese base maker Kichizô Inagaki.⁴⁶ Inagaki most certainly based the shape of the restored beak on the bronze models as the fragmentary Berlin ivory bird has only been published once in 1919 and the Dimpsey one was unknown until 2007. These two ivory birds with short beaks may be the original prototype for these birds of disaster. Nevadomsky confirms this suggestion as he was told by his Bini informants that this bird of prophecy had originally a short beak and a creamy-colored breast.⁴⁷

To conclude, Benin art has always contained skeuomorphs, object made habitually in one material that are also executed in another. Well known examples are of course both brass and ivory masks, brass and ivory double gongs and brass and ivory leopards. Ivory carving was an established art style at the court of Benin kingdom since its beginnings. One could even suggest that the tradition of ivory carving may have preceded from that of royal brass casting as both have a separate guild responsible for each material. The hereditary royal ivory's carvers' guild (the *Igbesanmwan*) competed for

prestige and royal patronage with the guild of brass workers. The *Igbesanmwan* always emphasized the antiquity of their hereditary carving tradition by claiming that it was founded in mythical times by the first ruler of Benin, long before the brass casters' guild.⁴⁸ Oba Ewuare the Great who reigned circa A.D. 1440 greatly encouraged ivory carving in the Benin kingdom. We are very fortunate to know the name of his first ivory and wood carver, Eghoghomaghan, famous as the first Master Carver of ivory and his successors owed much to his designs.⁴⁹ He may have trained a workshop of artists of which Eghoghomaghan II was the most talented court artist of Oba Esigie (AD 1517-1550) which became the maker of all the great early Benin ivories.⁵⁰

To conclude, all three types of scepters has a deep history going back firmly to the Golden Era of the Benin kingdom culture. Both type A and type C scepters are already represented on Benin plaques tentatively dated to A.D. 1540-1570. The results of C14 dating on four of the type A scepters gives a periodization between A.D. 1491-1780 (cat. n° 6, 8, 11 & 12). In terms of commemoration of historic events, both type B and type C scepters are displayed at the Ugie Oro festival to be struck in remembrance of the victory by Oba Esigie over the Atah(king) of Idah circa A.D. 1515.

Finally, objects carved from ivory are restricted to the royal family and certain favored associates. Ivory is difficult to obtain, beautiful and luxurious. Ivory is highly valued as its smooth whiteness is symbolic of Olokun's sacred kaolin clay and as such is considered "cool," a concept fundamental to Benin life and thought. Ivory then denotes the essence of purity, abundance and happiness suggesting an ability to create luxury and harmonious relations which outlast a person's lifespan.

45 See Paula Ben Amos, 1986:252, Dark, 1962:46 & 1971:72, Kaplan, 1981:23 and Nevadomsky, 1986, p. 44

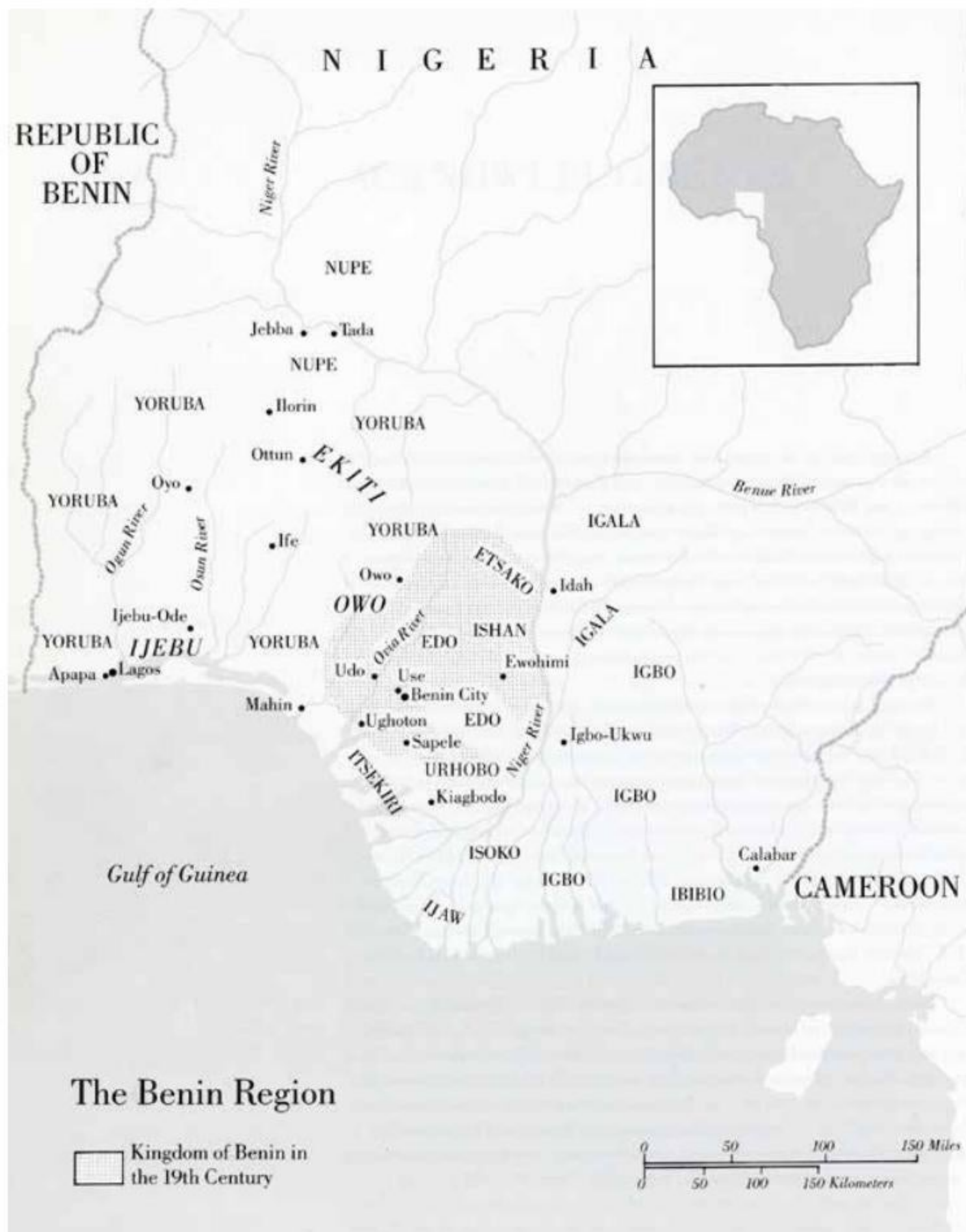
46 Guy Ladrière, Personal communication, May 15, 2020. Cfr. also Charles-Welsey Hourdé, "Kichizô Inagaki. In the Shadow of the Twentieth Century Greats", in *Tribal Arts*, XVII,1 N° 66, Winter 2012, pp. 96-105

47 Joseph Nevadomsky, "The Benin Bronze Horseman as the Ata of Idah", in *African Arts*, XIX, number 4, 1986, p. 44

48 Barbara Blackmun, "The Elephant and its ivory in Benin," in Doran H. Ross, editor, *Elephant. The Animal and its Ivory in African Culture*, Fowler Museum of Cultural History, Los Angeles, 1992, p. 163

49 Jacob Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin* (1st.ed.), Lagos, 1936, p. 25

50 It is not completely clear yet if this name represents actually two independent artists living a century apart as suggested by Stephan Eisenhofer, "The Origins of Benin Kingship in the Works of Jacob Egharevba", in *History in Africa*, Vol. 22, 1995, pp. 154-155



01

Benin ivory scepter
Height: 31 cm

• Provenance :

Gift of James Edge-Partington, London in 1898
British Museum, London inv. n° Af1898,1212.1

• Publication :

Charles Hercules Read and Ormonde Maddock Dalton, M.A., *Antiquities from the City of Benin and from other parts of West Africa in The British Museum*, London, William Clowes & Sons, 1899, p. 40, n° 8.



02

Benin ivory scepter

Height: 31,1 cm

- **Provenance :**

Found in Arbroath, Angus in 1930
James Hooper, Arundel
Christie's London, *African Art from the James Hooper Collection*,
June 14, 1976, lot 60
Klaus Perls Collection, New York
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and
Mrs. Klaus G. Perls, 1991, inv. n° 1991.17.88

- **Publication :**

Kate Ezra, *Royal Art of Benin. The Perls Collection in the
Metropolitan Museum of art*, New York, The Metropolitan
Museum of art, 1992, p. 206 plate 96



03

Benin ivory scepter Height: 30 cm

• Provenance :

Collected by Captain A.H. Turner, Resident at Benin
By family Descent
Dunbar Sloane, *Antique Auction*, Auckland, January 29, 1997,
lot 100
Wayne Heathcote, London
Bernard de Grunne, Brussels
Fondation Dapper, Paris

• Publication :

Christiane Falgayrettes-Leveau et alii, *Arts d'Afrique*, Paris
Musée Dapper, Gallimard, 2000, p. 33, fig. 15



04

Benin ivory scepter
Height: 31 cm

- **Provenance :**

Collection of George Byron Gordon, Curator of American
archeology at the University of Pennsylvania Museum
Estate of George Byron Gordon, 1927, N° 127
Philadelphia, Penn Museum inv. n° 29-93-22

- **Publication :**

Kathy Curnow, *Iyare! Splendors and Tension in Benin's
Palace Theatre*, Philadelphia, Penn Museum, 2016, p. 50



05

Benin ivory scepter
Height: 33,5 cm

- **Provenance :**

Collection Hans Meyer, Leipzig, 1900-24
Leipzig, Grassimuseum, Museum für Völkerkunde, inv. N° Maf 34577

- **Publication :**

Peter Göbel, *Kunst aus Benin Afrikanische Meisterwerke aus der Sammlung Hans Meyer*, Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, Grassimuseum, Leipzig, 1994, p. 102.



06



Benin ivory scepter

Height: 30, 4 cm

Date: A.D.1491- 1664 (C14 testing with 95,4 % probability)

• Provenance :

Mrs Mower White

Sotheby's, London, *Primitive Art*, Nov. 14th, 1961, lot 38

John Hewett, London, acquired at the above

Ernst Winizki, Zurich

Bernard de Grunne, Brussels

Jorge Welsh Works of Art, Lisbon

Collection Chambaud, Brussels



07

Benin ivory scepter
Height: 30,5 cm

• **Provenance :**

Purchased from Mr. W.J. Hider, S.B.S. Royal Navy, April 1897
Horniman Museum and Gardens, April 1897, inv. n° 3475a

• **Publications :**

The Seventh Annual Report of The Horniman Free Museum for 1897,
Benin Carvings, January, 1898.

F. Carlsen, "Benin in Guinea und seine rätselhaften Bronzen." in
Globus: Illustrierte Zeitschrift für Länder- und Völkerkunde, 1897,
Vol. 72, No. 20.

"Spoils from Benin in the Horniman Free Museum at Forest Hill,
"in *The Illustrated London News*, 1897, vol. 110, n° 3025





08

Benin ivory scepter

Height: 34,5 cm

Date: A.D. A.D. 1641-1813 (C14 testing
with 77 % probability)

• **Provenance :**

Private collection England
Christie's London, *Tribal Art*, Tuesday 4 December 1990,
p. 25, lot 107

• **Publication :**

William B. Fagg, *One Hundred Notes on Nigerian Art
from Christie's Catalogues 1974-1990*, Milano, Poro n° 7,
1991, p. 80 and plate 18





09

Benin ivory scepter Height: 30,5 cm

• Provenance :

William Downing Webster, London
Arthur Baessler, Berlin, 1902
Dresden, Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, inv. n°
13841

• Publications :

Siegfried Wolf, "Zum Problem der Frauendarstellungen
in der Benin-Kunst", in *Abhandlungen und Berichte des
Staatlichen Museums für Völkerkunde Dresden*, Band 31,
Akademie Verlag, Berlin 1970, Abb. D 7
Silvia Dolz, *Schätze aus Afrika: Benin Die Schenkung
Baessler*, Dresden, Staatliches Ethnographisches
Sammlungen Sachsen, 2006, p. 55, Abb. 73,



10

Benin ivory scepter Height: 30,5 cm

- **Provenance :**

Collected by George le Clerc Egerton (1852-1910) during the Benin Punitive expedition in February 1897
The Dumas-Egerton Trust, U.K.
On Loan, Oxford, Pitt-Rivers Museum, inv. n° 1991.13.9

- **Publications :**

Felix von Luschan, *Die Altertümer von Benin*, Berlin und Leipzig, De Gruyter, 1919, vol. I, p.414, Abb.639b
Linda Mowat, *Symbols of Kings. Benin Art at the Pitt Rivers Museum*, 1991, cover and p.9



11

Benin ivory scepter

Height: 30 cm

Date: A.D. 1468-1635 (C14 analysis with 95 % probability)

• **Provenance :**

Sotheby's & Co, *Catalogue of Primitive Art and Indian, Tibetan and Nepalese Sculpture*, London, November 30th 1970, lot 148.

John Hewett, London, acquired at the above

Lucien Vandewelde, Antwerpen

Collection Carlo De Poortere, Koortrijk, Belgium

By family descent

Private Collection, Belgium

• **Publication :**

Ariane Samain, "Une grande collection courtraisienne. La collection Carlo De Poortere" in *Connaissance des Arts*, n° 271, Septembre 1974, p. VII





12

Benin ivory scepter

Height: 29,8 cm

Date: A.D. 1497-1794 (C14 analysis with 95,4 % probability)

• **Provenance :**

Sotheby's & Co, *Catalogue of Primitive Art and Indian, Tibetan and Nepalese Sculpture*, Sotheby & Co., London, 30th November 1970, lot 149

John Hewett, London, acquired at the above

Lucien Vandeveld, Antwerpen

Collection Carlo De Poortere, Koortrijk, Belgium

By family descent

Private Collection, Belgium

• **Publication :**

Ariane Samain, "Une grande collection courtraisienne. La collection Carlo De Poortere" in *Connaissance des Arts*, n° 271, Septembre 1974, p. VII





13

Benin ivory scepter

- **Provenance :**

Collection of Admiral Sir Harry Rawson n° 17 (von Luschan, 1919, p. 476, footnote 1)
Possibly given to Nigeria in 1948 (W. Fagg, in MAN, 1953, n° 261, p. 166)
National Museum, Lagos inv. n° 48.36.16 (See Dark, 1982, n° G8/21)

- **Publication :**

Felix von Luschan, *Die Altertümer von Benin*, Berlin und Leipzig, De Gruyter, 1919, p.476, Abb. 806.



14

Benin ivory scepter
Height: 33,75 cm

• Provenance :

Sold by Mr. A. Ingram
London, The British Museum,
inv. n° Af1950,33.1



15

Benin ivory scepter
Height: 31,7 cm

- **Provenance :**

Purchased from Percy Beer, 1928
London, The British Museum, inv. n° Af1928,-148

- **Publication :**

Philip J.C. Dark et Werner Foreman, *Benin Art*, London,
Paul Hamlyn, 1960, plate 54
Philip J.C. Dark, *An illustrated catalogue of Benin art*,
G.K. Hall, Boston, 1982, illus. 44



16

Benin ivory scepter
Height: 32 cm

• **Provenance :**

Sotheby's London, *Tribal Art*, March 22, 1983, lot 140
Geneva, Musée Barbier-Mueller, inv. n° 1011-107

• **Publication :**

Laurence Mattet, *Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie*, Musée
Jacquemart-André, Paris, Hazan, 2007, p. 161



17

Benin ivory scepter Height: 33 cm

- **Provenance :**

William Downing Webster, London
Collection Georg Haas, 1899
Vienna, Museum für Völkerkunde, inv. n° 64.726

- **Publications :**

Franz Heger, "Alte Elfenbeinarbeiten aus Afrika in den Wiener Sammlungen", in *Mittheilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*, Band 29, 1899, p.101-109
Armand Duchâteau, *Bénin Trésor Royal*, Paris, Musée Dapper, 1990, p. 87.
Barbara Plankensteiner, ed., *Benin Kings and Rituals*, Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna, 2007, P. 404, cat. 179



18

Benin ivory scepter
Height: 34,5 cm

• **Provenance :**

Han Coray, Lugano

Paolo Morigi, Lugano, before 1975

Possibly Morris Pinto, Paris

Guy Loudmer & Hervé Poulain, *Arts Primitifs*,
Drouot, Paris, 16 décembre 1978, lot 46.

Paris, Musée des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, inv. n°
MNAN 78-6-1

Paris, Musée du quai branly, inv. n° 73.1978.6.1

• **Publication :**

Paolo Morigi, *Meisterwerke Altafrikanischer Kultur aus der Sammlung Casa Coray*, Lugano, 1968, cat. 66
Paolo Morigi, *Arte Africana : Le Sculture*, Primitive Art Gallery, Galeria Morigi, Magliaso Lugano, 1975, cat. 32

Colette Noll, *L'art de l'ancien Nigéria dans les collections publiques française*, Paris, Ministère des relations extérieurs, Association Française d'Action Artistique, 1984, p. 9

Jean Hubert Martin, Etienne Féau et Hélène Joubert, *Arts du Nigeria*, MNAO, Paris, 1997, p. 252, cat 19

Alberto Costa Romero de Tejada & Jean-Hubert Martin, *Africa : Magia y Poder. 2500 anos de arte en Nigeria*, Fundación "la Caixa", Barcelona, 1998, cat. 98, p. 113.



19

Benin ivory scepter

Height: 34,9 cm

• Provenance :

Charles Ratton, Paris, before 1930

Georges de Miré, Paris, acquired from the above

Paris, Maître Alphonse Bellier, *Sculptures anciennes d'Afrique et d'Amérique*. Collection G. de Miré, Hôtel Drouot, 16 décembre 1931, lot 40 (Frs 3.700)

Louis Carré, Paris, acquired from the above

Klaus G. Perls, New York

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs.

Klaus G. Perls, 1991,

Inv. n° 1991.17.90

• Publications :

Stephen Chauvet, « Objets d'or, de bronze et d'ivoire dans l'art nègre », in *Cahiers d'Art*, 5ème année, 1930, n° 1, p. 39, fig. 47

Valentin Marquetty, *Exposition d'art africain et d'art océanien*, Paris, Galerie Pigalle, 1930, n°137.

Louis Carré, *Comparative Primitive Sculpture*. Valentine Gallery, New York, 1935

André Lhote et alii, *Les Arts africains*, Paris, Cercle Volnay, p. 59, cat n° 212.

José Pijoán, « Arte de los pueblos aborígenes », in Cossío-Pijoán, *Summa Artis Historia general del Arte*, Bilbao, Madrid, Barcelona, 1931, vol.1, p. 234, fig.311.

Kate Ezra, *Royal Art of Benin. The Perls Collection*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harry N. Abrams Inc., New York, 1992, p. 207.

Charles-Wesley Hourdé et Nicolas Rolland, *Galerie Pigalle. Afrique Océanie. 1930. Une Exposition mythique*, Paris, 2018, p. 225, cat. N° 137



20

Benin ivory scepter Height: 32,5 cm

- **Provenance :**

Purchased from Mr. W.J. Hider, S.B.S. Royal Navy,
April 1897
Horniman Museum and Gardens, April 1897, inv. n°
3475

- **Publication :**

The Seventh Annual Report of The Horniman Free
Museum for 1897, *Benin Carvings*, January, 1898.
F. Carlsen, "Benin in Guinea und seine rätselhaften
Bronzen." in *Globus: Illustrierte Zeitschrift für
Länder- und Völkerkunde*, 1897, Vol. 72, No. 20.
"Spoils from Benin in the Horniman Free Museum
at Forest Hill," in *The Illustrated London News*, 1897,
vol. 110, n° 3025





21

Benin ivory scepter
Height: 34,2 cm

- **Provenance :**

Louis Carré, Paris, 1932
Charles Ratton Paris
Location unknown

- **Expositions :**

Exposition de bronzes et d'ivoires du Royaume de Benin, Paris, Musée d'Ethnographie, Palais du Trocadéro, 1932, p. 23, cat. 109 (Photo ex Musée de l'Homme, 1932, Photothèque musée du quai branly n° PV0077622)
Les Ivoires, Editions Tardy, Paris, 1977, p. 395, Fig. 3



22

Benin ivory scepter
Height: 38 cm

- **Provenance :**

William Downing Webster, London, 1898
Liverpool, World Museum, inv. n° 11.98.1

- **Publication :**

William Fagg, *Nigerian Images*, Lund Humphries,
London, 1963, plate 50
Peter Karpinski, "A Benin Bronze Horseman at
the Merseyside County Museum", in *African Arts*,
February 1984, Vol. XVII, number 2, p. 59, plate 10



23

Benin ivory scepter

Height: 40 cm

- **Provenance :**

Collection Fritz Lühge
Hamburg, Museum am Rothenbaum. Kulturen und
Künste der Welt (MARKK), inv. n° 2935, before 1902

- **Publications :**

Karl Hagen, "Die Vermehrung der Sammlungen,"
in *Jahrbuch der Hamburgischen Wissenschaftlichen
Austalten*, 1902, n° XIX, p. 26, fig. 15

Karl Hagen, "Altertümer von Benin im Hamburgischen
Museum für Völkerkunde," in *Mitteilungen dem
Museum für Völkerkunde in Hamburg*, 1917, vol. VI, N°
35, p. 36, Abb. 6

Felix von Luschan, *Die Altertümer von Benin*,
Veröffentlichungen aus dem Museum für Völkerkunde,
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 1919, Berlin und Leipzig: De
Gruyter, Abb. 805

Barbara Plankensteiner, ed. *Benin Kings and Rituals*,
Vienna, Museum für Völkerkunde, 2007, p. 459, cat. 243





24

Benin ivory scepter
Height: 37,5 cm

- **Provenance :**

National Museum, Benin inv. n° 27 (Cfr Dark, 1982, n° 05/61)

- **Publication :**

Ekpo Eyo, *Two Thousand Years Nigerian Art*, Federal Department of Antiquities, Lagos, 1977, p. 159
Jacques Kerchache et alii, *L'Art africain*, Paris, Citadelles Mazenod, 1988, p. 400, cat n° 461



25

Fragmentary Benin ivory scepter
Height: 13,75 cm



- **Provenance :**

William Downing Webster, London, 1901
Berlin, Museum für Völkerkunde, inv. n° III C 12 533

- **Expositions :**

William D. Webster, *Illustrated Catalogue of Ethnographical Specimens, European and Eastern Arms and Armour, Prehistoric and other Curiosities*, London, 1901, Vol. IV, Catalogue 29, plate 40 n° 36, inv. n° 11373



26

Benin ivory scepter Height: 39 cm

• Provenance :

William Downing Webster, Bicester, April 14, 1898
General Augustus Lane Henry Pitt-Rivers
The Pitt-Rivers Museum Farnham, Dorset
Alexandre Fox Lane Pitt-Rivers
Captain George Pitt-Rivers
Mrs. Stella Hawson Clive (Mrs. G. Pitt-Rivers)
Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, London, 1957
Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich, inv. UEA 231

• Publications :

August-Lane Pitt Rivers, *Antique Works of Art from Benin*,
Printed privately, Rushmore, 1900, plate 6, n° 22-24
Steven Hooper, ed., *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection*,
Volume II, Pacific, African and Native North American Art,
Yale University Press, New Haven 1997, cat. 115, pp. 148-149
Barbara Plankensteiner, *Benin*, Five Continents, Milano,
2010, p. 117



27

Benin ivory scepter Height: 32,4 cm

- **Provenance :**

Donated by Henry Nilus Thompson, January 1909
Oxford, The Pitt-Rivers Museum inv. n° 1909.1.1

- **Publication :**

Linda Mowat, *Symbols of Kings. Benin Art of the Pitt-Rivers Museum*, University of Oxford, 1990, p. 9, fig. 4



28

Benin ivory scepter
Height: 40,6 cm

• **Provenance :**

Sir Ralph Moor (Cfr. Charles H. Read, in Man, 1910, 29:48-51)

Donated by H.S. Kingsford in 1910

London, The British Museum, inv. n° Af1910,0618.5



29

Benin ivory scepter
Height: 40.6 cm

• **Provenance :**

Benin Punitive Expedition in February 1897
J.C. Stevens auction house, London April 4th, 1898
(purchased for £25.70)
General Augustus Lane Henry Pitt-Rivers (1827-1900)
The Pitt-Rivers Museum Farnham, Dorset
Alexandre Fox Lane Pitt-Rivers (1855-1927)
Captain George Pitt-Rivers (1890-1966)
Stella Hawson Clive (Mrs. G. Pitt-Rivers)
Robert Owen Lehman Collection, New York, 1970's
Promised Gift, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston 2012 inv.
n° L-G 7.16.2012

• **Publications :**

August-Lane Pitt Rivers, *Antique Works of Art from Benin*, Printed privately, Rushmore, 1900, plate 6, n° 19
William Fagg, *Nigerian Images*, Lund & Humphries, London, 1963, plate 52
Les Ivoires, Tardy Editeur, Deuxième partie, Paris, 1977, p. 395
Christeaud Geary, "The Robert Owen Lehman Collection of Ancient West African Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston", in *Tribal Art*, number 70, Winter 2013, p. 85, fig. 11



Edo Figure of a town chief (iyase), Benin Kingdom, Nigeria
Height: 48.9 cm
Provenance : The Vincent Price Collection, Los Angeles, 1960's
The Dallas Museum of Art, The Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, inc., 1994.196.McD



30

Benin ivory scepter
Height: 46 cm

- **Provenance :**

Dr. W.J. Ansorge, London, *A Catalogue of African Curios and Trophies Benin bronzes, Ivory carvings*, J.V. Stevens auctioneer, 39th November 1909, sale 11, 727
Collection Theodore Rautenstrauch, Berlin
Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum, inv. III C 8752

- **Publications :**

Felix von Luschan, *Die Altertümer von Benin*, Berlin und Leipzig, De Gruyter, 1919, plate 117
Barbara Plankensteiner, ed., *Benin Kings and Rituals*, Vienna, Museum für Völkerkunde, 2007, p. 478, cat. 263



31

Benin ivory scepter
Height: 35 cm

- **Provenance :**

National Museum, Benin City, inv. n° 226 (Cfr. Dark, 1982, cat. 06/58)

- **Publications :**

Ekpo Eyo, *Two Thousand Years. Nigerian Art*, Federal Department of Antiquities, Lagos, 1977, p. 159



32

Benin ivory scepter

Height: 34,5 cm

Date: A.D. 1650-1880 (C14 analysis with 76% probability)

• Provenance :

Collected by Edgar R. Dimsey, surgeon on the punitive expedition to Benin in February 1897

Christie's, *Art Africain, Océanien et précolombien*, Paris, 14 juin 2004, lot 174

Collection Prince Saud Al Thani, London acquired at the above

Binoche et Giquello, *Archéologie. Art Précolombien. Asie. Amérique du Nord. Afrique*, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 10 décembre 2014, lot 13, acquired at the above

Private Collection



Edgar R. Dimsey (1861-1930) in Christie's Paris, *Art Africain, Océanien et Précolombien*, 4 juin 2004, lot 174





33

Fragmentary Benin ivory scepter
Height: 15,5 cm

- **Provenance :**

William Downing Webster, London
Hans Meyer, Leipzig
Berlin, Museum für Völkerkunde, 1900, inv. N° III C
10870

- **Publications :**

Felix von Luschan, *Die Altertümer von Benin*, Berlin
und Leipzig, De Gruyter, 1919, plate 117



34

Benin ivory scepter (Beak wooden restoration by Inagaki)

Height : 32,5 cm

- **Provenance :**

Nicolas Brimo & Lucien Lascombes de Laroussilhe, Galerie Brimo de Laroussilhe, Paris
Charles Ratton Paris, 1932
Collection Guy Ladrière, Paris

- **Publications :**

Musée d'Ethnographie, Palais du Trocadéro, *Exposition de bronzes et ivoires du royaume de Benin*, Paris, 1932, p. 23, cat. 108

Siegfried Wolf, « Vogelstaltiges Benin-Zeremonialgerät aus Elfenbein », in *Abhandlungen und Berichte des Staatlichen Museums für Völkerkunde Dresden*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1963, pp.135-139 und Taf. 1

Marie-THérèse Brincard, ed, *Sounding Forms, African Musical Instruments*, 1999, American Federation of Art, p. 148 plate 99

Christiane Falgayrettes-Leveau, *Arts d'Afrique*, Paris, musée Dapper, 2002, fig. 17

Elena Martinez-Jacquet, ed., *Ode au grand art africain. Les statues meurent aussi*, Primedia, Arquennes, 2010, p. 170

Philippe Dagen et Maureen Murphy, *Charles Ratton. L'invention des arts « primitifs »*, Paris, musée du quai branly, 2013, p. 160, fig. 129



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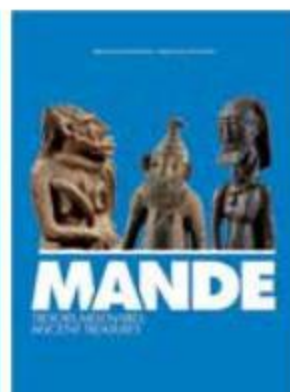
2018



2017



2017



2016



2016



2015



2015



2014



2014



2013



2013



2012



2012



2011



2011



2010



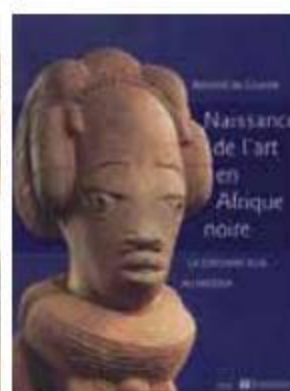
2008



2001



2001



1998



1979

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